



**STATEMENT OF THE HOLY SEE**

**AT THE TWENTY-SEVENTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

**OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY  
AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE (OSCE)**

**DELIVERED BY**

**HIS EXCELLENCY**  
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**SECRETARY FOR THE HOLY SEE'S RELATIONS WITH STATES**

Tirana (Albania)  
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Mr Chairman,

With greetings to you all from the Vatican, allow me to extend the best wishes, support and prayers of His Holiness Pope Francis to the participants of this 27<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Ministerial Council and to the entire OSCE family.

Furthermore, I wish to express my gratitude and that of my Delegation to the Chairman-in-Office, His Excellency Edi Rama, Prime Minister and Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania, as well as to the entire 2020 Albanian OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office for its endeavours during the course of this challenging year, marked by the Covid-19 pandemic.

### *Covid-19 pandemic*

The present pandemic is a serious test not only for every individual, but also for society as a whole and indeed for the international community. This health crisis made it abundantly clear that we cannot go on thinking only of ourselves; rather, we must work together, mindful that the burden carried by some necessarily affects humanity and the whole family of Nations.<sup>1</sup>

As Pope Francis pointed out: “The pandemic has exposed [...] the great inequality that reigns in the world. And the virus, while it does not distinguish between people, has found, in its devastating path, great inequalities and discrimination.”<sup>2</sup> We cannot omit the new forms of poverty created by the Covid-19 pandemic, which have exacerbated already existing poverties and added new ones. These include not only the serious and long-lasting consequences of the economic crisis, but also the lack of access to correct information and to education, as well as the suffering caused by social isolation, increased violence and distress, particularly for people in vulnerable situations.

Moreover, it is clear that the current pandemic has a disproportionate effect on women: they are being impacted even more by greater demands in teleworking, care and domestic work, as well as by unpaid leaves and job loss, especially in the informal sector where they are the majority and where financial protection and benefits are lacking and where personal safety is in danger.

Some of the measures imposed by States to combat the Covid-19 pandemic have had profound ramifications on different fundamental freedoms, including the freedom to manifest one’s religion or belief, while also limiting the religious, educational and charitable activities of faith communities. In this respect, civil authorities should always be aware of the severe consequences those regulations might create for religious or belief communities, which play an important role in

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, Sagrato of St Peter’s Basilica, 27 March 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, General Audience, 19 August 2020.

dealing with the crisis not only by their active support in the field of healthcare and social assistance, but also by their spiritual and moral help and their messages of solidarity and hope. Furthermore, the tools and policies put in place to help those most in need during health emergencies should always be based on two essential principles: the inclusion of all and the protection of the sacredness of human life.

However, we should not lose sight of the fact that the crisis “represent[s] a concrete opportunity for conversion, for transformation, for rethinking our way of life and our economic and social systems, which are widening the gap between rich and poor based on an unjust distribution of resources.”<sup>3</sup>

The Covid-19 pandemic has uncovered problems that already existed for years and that should no longer be avoided: “The world was relentlessly moving towards an economy that, thanks to technological progress, sought to reduce ‘human costs’; there were those who would have had us believe that freedom of the market was sufficient to keep everything secure. Yet the brutal and unforeseen blow of this uncontrolled pandemic forced us to recover our concern for human beings, for everyone, rather than for the benefit of a few.”<sup>4</sup> The current situation invites us to reflect on the need for a new solidarity, a conversion of mind and heart.

### *Challenges to security*

Mr Chairman,

This Ministerial Council crowns a year of significant anniversaries: the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the final Act of Helsinki and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe. Since then, much has been achieved. Cold War enemies have been reconciled, millions have seen their living standards improve significantly, and great progress has been made in the advancement of human rights. Nevertheless, many challenges still burden our common security.

We still face various persistent threats and other unresolved conflicts that are able to undermine the stability and security of the whole OSCE region. The “frozen conflicts”, some of which have lasted for decades, must not go unresolved; they demand a solution. The Holy See would like to encourage those around this virtual table to continue working for peace and justice, by implementing the commitments that they have undertaken. We continue to

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Address to the 75<sup>o</sup> General Assembly of the United Nations, 25 September 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, n. 33.

support dialogue and respect for international law as a means of resolving conflicts.

*The implementation, in good faith, of existing commitments*

The Holy See has very much appreciated the Albanian Chairmanship's objective to focus on the implementation, in good faith, of the existing commitments. In fact, many of the OSCE commitments still need to be implemented fully. With the attempt to cover more ground, expanding the commitments runs the risk of delaying the careful and full implementation of the existing ones, as well as overlapping and duplicating activities of other International Organizations.

The implementation of commitments does not only honour the self-commitment of every participating State, but it also demonstrates appreciation of our Organization and its members.

Moreover, the implementation of commitments in good faith is essential to avoid that these are substantially amended, overruled or transformed, for example, through an improper "interpretation", thus undermining the consensus rule, which is an essential pillar of our Organization. Furthermore, it is always important to bear in mind that previous commitments are not invalidated when new ones are adopted, since they build on each other and need to be considered in their entirety.

Despite the well-known challenges within our Organization, it is an encouraging sign that agreements and compromises can still be reached, as this was the case on the appointment of the heads of the four autonomous institutions of the OSCE.

*The protection of religious places*

In accordance with its particular duty to insist on the centrality of the freedom of religion or belief, the Holy See wishes to express its grave concern for the rising number of terrorist attacks, hate crimes and other manifestations of intolerance targeting persons, places of worship, cemeteries and religious sites across the OSCE area and beyond. The fact that many of these acts of violence have been perpetrated against believers when they gather to pray in their places of worship make them particularly heinous: havens of peace and serenity quickly become execution chambers, as defenceless children, women and men lose their lives simply for gathering to practice their religion.

It is even more regrettable that some of these abhorrent attacks are committed "in the name of religion". Let me emphasize that violence does not stem from religion but from its false interpretation or its transformation into

ideology. Violence, persecution and killing in the name of God is not religion but radicalism, which needs to be fought by all using all legitimate means.

In the comprehensive approach to security of our Organization, there is an explicit structural link between freedom of religion or belief and security, which heightens awareness of freedom of religion or belief not only as a universal human right to be protected for itself, but also as a fundamental factor for the creation of security within and between the participating States.

The protection of places of worship is a direct consequence of the protection of the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief. Therefore, the response to the security challenges faced by religious communities should be based on the understanding that the OSCE participating States have a common duty to guarantee the protection of communities from attacks.

For the OSCE to promote human dignity in an integral way, it must effectively address intolerance and discrimination against Christians, Jews, Muslims and members of other religions without prejudice or hierarchical selectivity, thus addressing hate crimes and security needs of all religious communities. The OSCE can be rightly proud of being one of the first International Organizations to raise the alarm on intolerance and discrimination against Christians. However, we must remain alert. Christians continue suffering from prejudice, intolerance, discrimination and violence.

In conclusion, I wish to renew my gratitude to the Albanian Chairmanship for its leadership and the efforts made during this past year and I extend my best wishes of success to the incoming Swedish Chairmanship, while assuring the continued cooperation and support of the Holy See.

Thank you, Mr Chairman!